Verse by Verse Focus Study (VVFS)

Genesis 18:1–2

Edition: Public
Focus Word: *Bowed*
Strong's Number: H7812

Part One – Verse of the Day (KJV)

Genesis 18:1–2 (KJV):

1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and **bowed himself toward the ground**.

Part Two – Bible Versions

King James Version (1611)

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and **bowed himself toward the ground**.

American Standard Version (1901)

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And Jehovah appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and **bowed himself to the earth**.

Douay-Rheims Bible (1899 American Edition)

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And the Lord appeared to him in the vale of Mambre as he was sitting at the door of his tent, in the very heat of the day.
2 And when he had lifted up his eyes, there appeared to him three men standing near him: and as soon as he saw them, he ran to meet them from the door of his tent, and **adored down to the ground**.

Webster's Bible (1833)

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And the LORD appeared to him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lifted up his eyes and

looked, and lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and **bowed himself towards the ground**.

Young's Literal Translation (1898)

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And Jehovah appeareth unto him by the oaks of Mamre, and he is sitting at the opening of the tent, in the heat of the day;
2 and he lifteth up his eyes and looketh, and lo, three men standing near him; and he seeth, and runneth to meet them from the opening of the tent, and **boweth himself to the earth**.

English Revised Version (1885 NT / 1895 OT)

Public domain
Official British revision of the KJV

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And the LORD appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and **bowed himself to the earth**.

Coverdale Bible (1535)

Public domain — historical / devotional use

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And the LORD appeared vnto him in the oake groue at Mamre, as he sat at the tent dore in the heate of the daye.
2 And he lift vp his eyes and loked, and lo, three men stode by him: and when he sawe them, he ran to mete them from the tent dore, and **fell downe to the grounde**.

Bishop's Bible (1568)

Public domain — historical interest

Genesis 18:1–2
1 And the LORD appeared vnto him in the playne of Mamre, as he sate in the tent doore in the heate of the day.
2 And he lift vp his eyes and loked, and lo, three men stode by him: and when he sawe them, he ranne to meete them from the tent doore, and **fell downe to the grounde**.

Geneva Bible (1599)

Public domain text

Genesis 18:1–2
1 Then the LORD appeared vnto him by the okes of Mamre as he sate in the tent doore in the heat of the day.
2 And he lift vp his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him: and when he sawe them, he ranne to meete them from the tent doore, and **fell downe to the grounde**.

Part Three – Commentary Sources

Matthew Henry's Commentary (1706)

Genesis 18:1–2

"Abraham sat at his tent door, not only in expectation of some

visit from his neighbours, but in a disposition to be hospitable; and he was ready to give entertainment to strangers. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood by him. He saw them at some distance, coming toward him, and, though he was old, he ran to meet them, and bowed himself toward the ground, as one that was very glad to see them, and desirous to invite them to his house. Note, a generous disposition to do good, and to show kindness, is of great use in religion, and very pleasing to God."

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary (1871)

Genesis 18:1–2

"The Lord appeared—another manifestation of the Divine presence, more familiar than any yet vouchsafed. Abraham was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day—the time of noon repose, when the Arabs, passing travellers, turn aside to some convenient shade. Three men stood by him—the appearance of three human travellers. He ran to meet them —showing the warm hospitality of the East, which counts it an honor to entertain strangers. Bowed himself toward the ground—a customary mark of respect and welcome."

John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (1746–1763)

Genesis 18:1–2

"And bowed himself toward the ground; not in a way of religious adoration, but in a civil manner, as was usual in those eastern countries, in honouring persons of rank and strangers, especially those that came from afar. Though Abraham afterwards knew who they were, yet at present he took them to be men, and showed them the respect due to such, as the custom of the country directed."

Adam Clarke's Commentary (1831)

Genesis 18:1–2

"He bowed himself toward the ground—this was the custom of the country. Abraham had the deepest sense of hospitality, and it was considered both a duty and a pleasure to receive and entertain strangers. His running to meet them, and prostrating himself before them, were marks of respect paid to persons who, by their appearance, seemed worthy of it."

Geneva Bible Notes (1599)

Genesis 18:2

"He bowed himself toward the ground: which declareth his humility and reverence toward strangers, according to the manner of those countries."

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament (1832–1851)

Genesis 18:1–2

"He bowed himself toward the ground. This is the ordinary Eastern mode of respectful salutation. Abraham's whole conduct is in accordance with the usages of hospitality, which were then, as now, held in the highest esteem in the East. His alacrity and courtesy are conspicuous throughout the scene."

The Pulpit Commentary (1880s–1919)

> **Genesis 18:1–2**"Bowed himself toward the ground. This act of obeisance, according to Eastern custom, expressed profound respect. The narrative describes Abraham as displaying the characteristic hospitality of the age, marked by eagerness, humility, and reverence toward unknown visitors."

Part Four – Historical and Cultural Viewpoint

Historical Setting

Authorship and Date

Genesis is traditionally attributed to **Moses**, writing under divine inspiration. The events of Genesis 18 occur during the **patriarchal period**, generally dated to the early second millennium BC (c. 2000–1800 BC), during the lifetime of **Abraham**.

Geographic Location

The setting is the **plains (or oaks) of Mamre**, near **Hebron** in the land of Canaan. Mamre was associated with established encampments and pastureland, suitable for nomadic herdsmen. Scripture records Abraham dwelling there earlier (Genesis 13:18).

Immediate Narrative Context

Genesis 18 follows the covenant reaffirmation of Genesis 17. Abraham has recently received the covenant sign of circumcision and the promise concerning Isaac. Genesis 18 introduces a divine visitation that precedes the announcement of Isaac's birth and the intercession for Sodom.

Cultural Considerations

Tent-Dwelling and Daily Rhythm

Abraham is described as sitting "in the tent door in the heat of the day" (Genesis 18:1). In the ancient Near East, this was the customary time for rest. Sitting at the tent entrance allowed visibility of approaching travelers and facilitated hospitality.

Hospitality in the Ancient Near East

Hospitality was not optional but a **cultural obligation**. Travelers depended upon local residents for food, water, and shelter. Refusal of hospitality could bring dishonor upon a household and even upon a clan.

Common elements of hospitality included:

- Immediate approach to visitors
- Physical gestures of respect
- Provision of water, food, and rest

Physical Gestures of Respect

Bowing or prostration was a **standard social gesture**, not restricted to worship. It expressed humility, honor, and deference, particularly toward:

- Elders
- Guests
- Persons of perceived rank or dignity

This gesture functioned socially before it functioned religiously.

Cross-References

1. The Bible Itself (Primary Source)

Scripture provides multiple internal witnesses to the cultural practice of bowing in hospitality or respect:

- **Genesis 19:1** – Lot bows to the visitors at Sodom.
- **Genesis 23:7** – Abraham bows before the people of the land when negotiating burial rights.
- **Genesis 33:3** – Jacob bows before Esau as a gesture of humility and reconciliation.
- **1 Samuel 24:8** – David bows before Saul as an act of respect, not worship.

2. Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (1894)

The Treasury links Genesis 18:2 with:

- Genesis 19:1 (Lot’s similar gesture)
- Genesis 23:7
- Genesis 42:6 (Joseph’s brothers bowing)
- Ruth 2:10 (Ruth bowing before Boaz)

These references demonstrate:

- Repeated cultural behavior
- Consistent bodily expression of humility and respect
- Continuity across generations

The Treasury supplies **connection, not explanation**, and supports the cultural frame of the passage.

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3. Smith’s Bible Dictionary (1884)

Hospitality
Smith notes that hospitality in the patriarchal age was regarded as a **sacred duty**, especially toward strangers. Encampments often depended on mutual courtesy for survival in arid regions.

Mamre
Smith identifies Mamre as a location near Hebron associated with ancient trees and settled encampments, indicating stability and prominence within the region.

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4. Easton’s Bible Dictionary (1897)

Mamre
Easton confirms Mamre as a district near Hebron, often referenced by its notable oaks or terebinths. Such locations served as landmarks and meeting points.

Bowing
Easton describes bowing as a gesture expressing submission or reverence, often civil rather than religious, depending on context.

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5. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Early Edition)

ISBE highlights:

- The **social importance of hospitality** among Semitic peoples
- The role of **physical gestures** in communicating honor and submission
- The nomadic context of Abraham’s life, requiring strong hospitality norms

ISBE supports the understanding that gestures like bowing were **embedded in social expectation**, not necessarily theological intention.

Geography & Archaeological Context (When Needed)

Regional Importance
Hebron and its surrounding plains lay along trade routes and migration paths, making encounters with travelers common.

Environmental Pressure
Scarcity of water and shelter heightened the importance of hospitality as a survival-based social code.

Part Five – Analysis

(Word Study, Theology, and Scriptural Integration)

A. Focus Word Analysis (Lexical Study)

Original Language Word:
שָׁחָה

Transliteration:
shāchāh

Strong's Number:
H7812

Lexical Range (Public-Domain Sources)

Primary Meaning:
To bow down; to prostrate oneself.

Secondary / Extended Meanings:

- To show respect or honor
- To lower oneself physically before another
- To prostrate in reverence
- To worship (context-dependent)

Grammatical Form:
Verb (Qal stem most common)

Lexical Notes:
According to **Brown–Driver–Briggs (BDB)**, שָׁחָה fundamentally denotes **physical lowering of the body**, with meaning determined by **context**, not by the verb alone. The same verb may describe:

- Civil respect (toward humans)
- Submission (toward authority)
- Worship (toward God)

The **action is bodily**; the **intention is inferred from context**.

Usage in Scripture

General Frequency:
Occurs **170+ times** in the Hebrew Bible.

Typical Contexts:

- Greeting or honoring persons (Genesis, Ruth, Samuel)
- Courtly or political submission

- Religious worship (Psalms, prophetic texts)

Notable Pattern:
The verb does **not** itself define worship.
Worship is determined by:

- The **object** of the action
- The **narrative setting**
- The **accompanying language**

This is critical for Genesis 18:2.

B. Immediate Contextual Analysis

Literary Context

Genesis 18:1–2 functions as the **narrative introduction** to a larger episode:

- Divine appearance (v.1)
- Human perception of visitors (v.2)
- Hospitality sequence (vv.3–8)
- Progressive revelation (vv.9–15)

At the moment of bowing:

- The visitors are described as **“three men”**
- No divine titles are yet spoken by Abraham
- The action occurs **before dialogue**

This places the bowing firmly within **initial human response**, not theological recognition.

Relationship to Surrounding Verses

- **Verse 1**: The LORD appears (narrative omniscient statement)
- **Verse 2**: Abraham sees “three men” (Abraham’s perspective)

The text intentionally holds these two viewpoints in tension:

- What the reader knows
- What Abraham knows at the moment of action

The bowing occurs within **Abraham’s limited perception**, reinforcing a **social**, not explicitly cultic, meaning.

D. Canonical Pattern Recognition

(Occasional Upgrade – Option 3)

Passage	Phrase	Observed Pattern
Gen 18:2	bowed himself toward the ground	Social gesture precedes revelation
Gen 19:1	bowed himself with his face toward the ground	Same verb, same context
Gen 23:7	bowed himself before the people	Civil respect
Ps 95:6	let us worship and bow down	Explicit worship context

Canonical Observation:
Across the canon, **שָׁחָה does not carry intrinsic theological weight**. Meaning emerges from **object, context, and accompanying speech**. Genesis 18:2 fits the **social-respect pattern**, not the explicit worship pattern.

E. Doctrinal and Theological Reflection

Key Theological Insight:
Genesis 18:2 demonstrates that **humility and reverence can be rightly expressed without full theological clarity**, and that God engages humanity even within limited understanding.

Supporting Observations:

- The bowing is real, physical, and intentional.
- The meaning of the action unfolds as revelation progresses.
- Scripture allows posture to be meaningful without forcing immediate doctrinal precision.

Guardrails Applied:

- No later theology imported backward
- Meaning derived from text and canon
- Worship not assumed without textual indicators

F. Synthesis and Summary

Summary Statement:
In Genesis 18:2, Abraham’s bowing (שָׁחָה, H7812) is a culturally grounded act of humility and honor toward perceived human visitors, functioning as a narrative entry point rather than an explicit act of worship.

Connection to the Broader Canon:
This verse contributes to the biblical pattern in which **reverent posture often precedes revelation**, preparing the ground for deeper divine-human encounter without confusing social honor with worship.

Part Six – Interlinear Hebrew Display

(OT-Style Stacked Interlinear Layout)

A. Purpose of the Interlinear Section

Objective:
To visually display the **original Hebrew wording** of the clause containing the focus word, allowing the reader to observe:

- Original word order
- Lexical components
- Grammatical relationships
- Emphasis created by structure

This section **supports** Part Five but does not replace it.

B. Selection of the Interlinear Clause

Selected Clause:
“and bowed himself toward the ground”

Hebrew Clause (from Genesis 18:2):
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה

Reason for Selection:

- Contains the **focus word** (שָׁחָה)
- Represents the **physical and grammatical core** of Abraham’s response
- Frequently echoed elsewhere in Genesis using the same verb and structure

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C. Original Language Header

Original Language:
Hebrew (Old Testament)

Textual Basis:
Masoretic Text (underlying the KJV tradition)

D. Stacked Interlinear Display (Primary Layout)

Original Hebrew	Transliteration	English Gloss
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ	*vayyishtachū*	and he bowed himself
אָרְצָה	*ʾārtsāh*	toward the ground

E. Grammatical Observations (Brief, Non-Interpretive)

Word Form Notes:

- **וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ**
  - Verb
  - Root: שָׁחָה (H7812)
  - Wayyiqtol form (vav-consecutive + imperfect)
  - Indicates a **completed narrative action**
- **אָרְצָה**
  - Noun: אֶרֶץ (*ʾerets*, “earth/land”)
  - Directional *he* suffix (-ָה)
  - Conveys motion **toward** or **down to** the ground

F. Structural Notes

- The verb appears **before** the directional noun, emphasizing **action first**
- The construction highlights **physical movement**, not internal intent
- The directional ending reinforces **full bodily lowering**, not a partial gesture

These observations remain grammatical, not theological.

G. Literal Rendering

Word-for-Word English Rendering:
“**And he bowed himself ground-ward**”

Purpose:
To reflect:

- Hebrew word order
- Directional force
- Physical concreteness

This is not a polished translation.

H. Transition Statement

This interlinear display highlights how the Hebrew text emphasizes **physical posture and direction**, grounding the analysis of bowing in Genesis 18:2 within observable linguistic structure rather than assumed theological meaning.

With the language now clearly displayed and grounded, the study is ready to move into its final section:

Part Seven – Prayer and Reflection

Purpose of This Section

This section moves the study from **understanding to response**, inviting the reader to reflect personally and prayerfully on the truth revealed in Genesis 18:1–2, especially as it relates to humility, posture, and readiness before God.

A. Summary Reflection (Theological Bridge)

Genesis 18:1–2 presents a picture of humility expressed through action before understanding is fully formed. Abraham's bowing reflects a heart inclined toward reverence, honor, and openness, even before the nature of the encounter is revealed. Scripture shows that God often meets His servants in ordinary moments when their posture is already shaped by humility. The focus word *bowed* reminds us that outward posture can reflect an inward readiness to receive what God is about to reveal.

B. Personal Heart Examination

Take time to reflect quietly on the following questions:

- What does Abraham's immediate response reveal about his heart toward others and toward God?
- In what ways does my posture—physical, emotional, or spiritual—reflect humility and readiness before God?

- Are there moments when God may be drawing near, but my attention or posture prevents me from recognizing it?
- How do I respond when God's work begins in ways I do not yet fully understand?

(Allow space for silence or written reflection.)

C. Christ-Centered Reflection

The humility displayed by Abraham points forward to the greater humility revealed in Jesus Christ. Christ Himself took the lowest place, humbling Himself to serve, to welcome, and ultimately to give His life. Where Abraham bowed toward the ground in reverence, Christ descended fully into humanity, showing that God draws near to those who walk humbly. In Christ, humility is not weakness, but the pathway through which God's purposes are revealed and fulfilled.

D. Prayer Focus

Use the following framework to guide prayer:

Adoration
Praise God for His nearness and His willingness to reveal Himself to those who walk humbly.

Confession
Acknowledge areas where pride, distraction, or self-reliance have shaped your posture before God.

Thanksgiving
Thank God for moments when He has drawn near, even when His presence was not immediately recognized.

Petition
Ask God to shape your heart with humility, readiness, and reverence, so that you may respond rightly when He moves.

"Lord, teach me to walk humbly before You.

Shape my heart to be attentive and ready when You draw near.

Help my life reflect reverence, openness,

and trust in Your purposes. Amen."

E. Written Response Section

For personal or group study, consider writing responses to the following prompts:

- **My response to God’s Word today:**

- **What I am convicted of:**

- **What I am encouraged by:**

F. Closing Encouragement

Continue to meditate on Genesis 18:1–2, remembering that God often reveals Himself in ordinary moments to hearts already inclined toward humility. Trust that a reverent posture before God prepares the way for deeper understanding and faithful response.